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ABSTRACT

A staff development program has been organized and conducted by the teachers in a middle school. At a weekly early morning meeting, teachers come together to discuss a wide range of educational topics. Participation is voluntary. The program was created to promote staff involvement, collaboration, partnership, cooperation, interactive development, and teacher planning. (JD)

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"TEACHER MANAGED STAFF DEVELOPMENT"

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TEACHER MANAGED STAFF DEVELOPMENT

It's 7:05 on a Tuesday morning. In just over forty minutes 670 students will be streaming through the doors of Fugett Middle School. This is planning time; teachers are alone in their rooms organizing their day. Several of the instructors' desks are empty however. Several have exchanged this time for something they have found more valuable.

In the home economics suite one can hear animated voices; a lively discussion ensues. Two people volley the points of their disagreement. Others nod assent. Someone diverges into another consideration.

This is Fugett Middle School's "Professional Educator's Breakfast Group." Based on the premise that people have a desire to learn, grow, and be challenged, a group of educators meet on a weekly basis for the purpose of staff development. These meetings provide a regular opportunity for staff members to meet in a climate of support for the purpose of dialoging, collaborating, sharpening skills, discussing educational issues, studying educational theories, and growing as professionals. The beauty of this program is that it is totally volunteer and teacher managed.

At each weekly gathering a member of the group serves as the chairperson. This person is responsible for the selection and presentation of an article, idea, or activity as well as serving as the moderator for the group discussion. This is an important component of the program. By allowing different people to assume leadership, the personal development of each individual is being enhanced. Since one of the goals of this staff development idea is teacher involvement, our leadership sharing insures that each person will be an active participant. Another benefit from the shared leadership concept has been the highly diversified range of topics that have been presented. Since September, we have studied: family trends and the roles of schools in society, the pros and cons of tracking, the Gregoric Style Delineator, cooperative learning, team teaching, the effects of food on the mind, theory versus practice, school versus community run sports programs, and Maslow's hierarchy as it applies to the classroom. Already our calendar for 1990 is being filled up with thought provoking ideas and activities.

What has been extremely encouraging to all the participants is the supportive climate of the group. This has enabled all of us to openly express opinions, be receptive to different ideas, admit areas of weakness, and seek advice from each other.

TEACHER MANAGED STAFF DEVELOPMENT

In order to insure the needed supportive climate certain guidelines have been put into place. All participants realize that we are not meeting to discuss fellow workers or students. The meetings are not times to air complaints. Rather the goal of our staff development group is to make our meetings a positive educational experience. Each member is committed to this goal. All of us are hoping to create better channels of communication within the school, be more aware of educational research, particuarly that concerning middle schools, and to collaborate and successfully apply the new ideas we learn. Our focus is a positive one. Through our careful examination of research, our shared insights and observations, and our desire to implement what we are learning, we see ourselves as professionals who are extending our knowledge as well as expanding our educational competence.

Although this program is still in it early stages, the positive results derived from it, as well as the support it is generating, point to the fact that our school based staff development program is on a successful path. Even teachers at Fugett who could not participate in the meetings welcomed the idea. Others who have not participated have expressed interest in attending future meetings. Already group members have tried new ideas and strategies in classsrooms. Interdisciplinary planning has been used, and a greater openness to share ideas and materials has developed. Another benefit from the "Breakfast Group" has been that supportive relationships are being created among the members.

One participant describes another advantage of the program. "Teachers and other educators are somewhat isolated. There is no time set aside on any given day for sharing ideas or discussing the latest issues in education. Lunch is usually devoted to small talk or issues that have little to do with education. I like the idea of setting aside some time, expressly for this purpose, that is for discussing issues and trends and examining their impact."

From the viewpoint of Dr. Robert Shapley, the principal, the "Breakfast Group" is a beneficial addition to a school. Dr. Shapley recognizes that this program is a mutually developmental partnership, and he heartilly endorses it. The school organization benefits due to the increased growth and improvement of staff, and the individual benefits by seeing that he or she is affecting the school organization in a positive way. Perhaps the

greatest benefit comes to the students who become the recipients of new strategies, ideas, and activities.

At this time thirteen of thirty five staff members are a part of the "Professional Educator's Breakfast Group." I believe that this group of educators is providing a grass roots movement that will spread to other staff members and hopefully other schools.

In the past many attempts at staff development have centered on a top down approach. Often great expense is put forth to bring in a renowned expert to speak to, stimulate, and hopefully motivate to action a significant number of faculty. This can happen when the presentation is interesting, relevant, and has a broad enough focus to reach the entire staff. Teachers can, however, leave such sessions flat and unmotivated due to their lack of participation. Since education describes diverse activities as well as encompasses varying age groups, methods, and environments, a comprehensive staff development program must be in place to cover a wide set of aims and meet particular needs.

Alex Main in his book, Educational Staff Development, referred to staff development as a program that instills in the participants a desire to cultivate skills whose application will improve the efficiency and effectiveness with which the anticipated results of a particular organizational segment are achieved.[1] I believe that a program such as the "Professional Educator's Breakfast Group" provides an environment for both staff and organizational growth.

Educational research by psychologists Stephen Glenn and William Glasser has consistently shown that the more ownership people feel in an activity the more positive the results. People need to be active participants in a program if an organization is going to succeed. By opening up the channels for greater staff dialogue, collaboration, and problem solving people's needs for personal and interpersonal growth are cared for and consequently the organization thrives. As more members of a system are invited to participate, there will be an increase in readiness to accept and promote innovation.

The "Professional Educator's Breakfast Group" rounds out the West Chester Area School District's staff development program. This adjunct program has its strength in its staff involvement, collaboration, partnership, cooperation, interactive development, and teacher planning.

TEACHER MANAGED STAFF DEVELOPMENT

Staff development must continue to be an ever growing concern of schools. According to Stanley Elam, Jerome Cramer, and Ben Brodinsky in their report Staff Development-Problems and Solutions, the staff development reform movement was described as being one of the most important educational forces of the decade.[2] Ernest Boyer, a strong proponent of staff development believes that a program of continuing education for teachers must continue if education is going to improve.[3]

In conclusion, the staff development idea that I am presenting is a simple, enjoyable, and inexpensive way of supplementing a total staff development program. The "Breakfast Group" approach invites dialogue, collaboration, and participation. In my opinion teacher managed components such as the "Breakfast Group," when added to an existing staff development program will bring greater participation, higher morale, and better education.

FOOTNOTES

[1]Alex Main, "Educational StaffDevelopment," (London: Croom Helm; 1985) p. 2.

[2]Stanley M. Elam, Jerome Cramer, and Ben Brodinsky, "Rethinking-and Remaking-Staff Development," Staff Development: Problems and Solutions (AASA Critical Issues Report; 1986), p. 5.

[3]Ibid. p.9.

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